

In the Wandering

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Summary: He had appeared one day, disrupting the quietness and stillness of her life. This silent wild man had stricken down everything she had taught herself to know. feralHiccup AU.

## 1. Chapter 1

AN: I don't know where this came from. Or what I'm doing with it. Actually I do, but I'm scared to admit it. But if you have been reading my other AU, Turntable, I haven't abandoned it. I just haven't felt any movement on it. Funny thing about it was I was reading a book the entire time I was writing that story, and when I finished said book, my motivation for Turntable kind of died along with it. I hope to finish it soon, do not despair! For now, enjoy thisâ€¦|weirdâ€¦|thing as it unfolds.

-O-O-O-

Rain like knives clattered against the paned windows, making them rattle and whistle against the weak seals. Inside the little hut, the blonde woman sat near the fire, looping thread through the hem of a skirt. Her fingers ached; she wasn't sure exactly how long she'd been at this, but it kept her busy. Valka had been gone since before evening fell, and she needed to keep herself awake. It was customary that they waited for the other to return before meals or going to bed. An unspoken rule that had never been broken until tonight when Astrid slowly slurped at her bowl of lamb stew, unable to delay her growling belly any longer. But she would stay awake. That much she could manage as long as she kept busy.

She groaned and jabbed the needle through the fabric again, loosening a kink in the thread. She hated sewing. She had never been good at it, always losing her patience, her legs aching from the act of sitting still for a long period of time. She wasn't used to working at a task that required such refined motor skills.

Frustrated with her lack of ability and the length of Valka's

absence, she tossed the skirt aside into the mending basket once she'd knotted the end of the thread.

Lightening lit up the room, overpowering the fire's glow and throwing slanted shadows across the wide room. Their hut was seemingly small, but enough for the two of them, with a loft that jutted over the small shed at the back of the house, a wall hiding it and narrow stairs leading up to it. The kitchen and sitting area all connected but had obvious definition, and Valka's small bedroom was sectioned off with a door just off the sitting area.

Astrid had lived here since she'd been orphaned. Other children from the near village had come and gone, but Astrid had always remained, even still to her eighteenth birthday when most other girls were married off and birthing children. It was choice, a combination of her need to be independent and the knowledge that the village held nothing for her. For either of them.

She was not certain of all of the details of Valka's separation from them, but their visits were scarce and when they needed to go down to the small and sturdy village set on the jutting cliff, it was quick and hardly social.

Even with the separation between them, the villagers always seemed to find a purpose for the mad-woman that lived up in the mountains. Children, when they were left parentless either by dragon attack or sickness, were put in Valka's care. This too was a rarity. Because the village had been established for five generations, families sprawled with aunts and uncles and others who would take in strays. But Astrid had been an exception after her only uncle had been shamed from the village and her parents killed. The Thorston twins were here when they were all young, but as unbelievable as it was, they were taken in by another family who were unrelated but had lost their own young children to dragon attacks. Since they returned to the village, Astrid had seen little of them.

So she remained as Valka's friend and partnered with her in maintaining their livestock and small crop, everything that attributed to the simple life they lived apart from the others on the island. She wasn't sure what had caused their companionship to last this long. Perhaps it was their mutual loneliness.

She was nearly ready to call it all off and go to bed without waiting for the other woman to return. The storm was intensifying, and though it had been morning since she'd seen Valka, she did not worry about her return. The woman was just as good about taking care of herself as Astrid was. She supposed that's what developed when necessity required it.

She stood, turning for the uneven steps that led up to the loft, but she whipped around again when the door crashed open, banging loudly against the inside wall.

A halo of lightening outside illuminated a tall and lithe figure, her damp braids heavy at her back, but a new load tossed over one shoulder. Astrid would've thought she carried a newly slaughtered sheep if the woman had not stepped into the warmer lighting of their house.

Her boots thudded heavily against the floorboards, making the house

rumble differently than the lightening had. Astrid glared, ready to demand answers as to where she'd been and why she'd been gone so long, but her eyes rose again to the oversized bundle the woman carried.

A pair of tanned arms dangled lifelessly around her legs. A wet mess of dark hair and even wetter expanse of furs were what must've made Astrid think the human figure was livestock.

A breath puffed from the older woman's chest when she leaned low, gently shuffling and sliding the weight of the boyâ€"man?â€"off her shoulder and into the large chair by the fire that Astrid had only just vacated.

"What are you doing?" Astrid demanded in a low whisper but almost too bitterly. Her eyes shifted between the woman and the new guest. His body folded naturally into a curled mass, head falling limply against the side of the chair. His arm escaped from the furs he was wrapped in, dangling over her basket of mending, dripping dirty rain drops into it. She scowled. "Where have you been?" Her words were rushed into two combining questions.

Valka was busy tugging the matted cloak of furs around the boy's lifeless shoulders. She smoothed away his mangled hair from his face with one tender motion that Astrid was not unfamiliar with.

"Who is that?" she hissed, stepping closer but standing in Valka's shadow.

"I found him. He's not injured, but unconscious. And he would've caught his death out there if I had left him." She was moving to the tiny alcove under Astrid's stairs, where there was a tiny cot and a makeshift bedroll they rarely used.

"Is he from the village?" With full view of the body now, Astrid leaned nearer, arching forward so she wouldn't be too close but close enough to see the dark fan of lashes that brushed against the boy's cheeks, his dark eyebrows knit close in sleep and a strong jaw. Freckles were peppered over his skin where there were not streaks of mud that blurred them. She could not place the features, but he did not look unfamiliar. There was a tiny scar at his chin that stood paler than the rest of skin under the fire's glow, and she would've missed it otherwise.

"No," Valka answered, un-cinching the roll and flattening it over the thick animal skin of the cot.

"You found him alone?"

"You're full of questions, aren't you?" the woman said, turning toward her adoptive-daughter and trying a smile, though Astrid knew her well enough to notice something in her expression that was off. Something that was harsh. Worried? She couldn't place the emotion.

The woman turned back to her work and spoke again. "Alone. In the cove. I don't know where he came from or how he got here, but I couldn't very well just leave him. He'll stay with us until we can figure it all out."

Astrid turned back to look at the boy, her braid falling over her shoulder. The rain on his skin was drying and his features seemed to have relaxed since he'd been brought out of the cold. Harsh hail slapped the windows now, and maybe it was a good thing that this strange boy had been brought here after all. Valka often cared too much for life, Astrid thought. She was always bringing weak and injured animals home, and had devoted herself in the past to loving the children the village no longer wanted. It was a blessing and curse to care for things that deeply. It had brought her here, but that same devotion always seemed to leave Valka on the short end of things. She hoped this wasn't another of those situations.

When Valka asked, she helped to cradle his head while they moved him to the cot. His hair was soft and damp but tangled, and in some places had even become dreadlocks. In the firelight, it glowed a warm rusty chestnut color. When the new and dry furs drooped over his shoulders, Astrid saw for the first time that he was wearing only a threadbare tunic. It was old and tattered with holes at its collar, and soaked through with rainwater. Valka shifted the covers again to tuck beneath his chin. He needed as much heat as they could provide.

Once he was covered, Astrid backed away. Something about this boy did not feel right. It was not her usual protective instincts that told her so. It was something different. She would not get too close.

For a moment, the boy shifted uncomfortably and made the tiniest of noises. Valka was there, shushing him and smoothing his hair back again. He quieted and did not wake.

Once the strange boy was settled and the slow rhythm of his breathing matching the fire's hiss, the women parted into their rooms. Astrid tip-toed up to her loft, glancing down for one last look at the lost boy's face. Where had he come from? Who was he? And how had he ended up on their island, with no ship or boat or crew to speak of (at least none that Valka had mentioned). Would he tell them? Would he be gone before either of them woke tomorrow?

There weren't any answers. Not tonight. Astrid eased her door shut with the tiniest of clicks so as not to wake him, not completely out of politeness. On the other side of her door was the unknown, and she would cause as little disturbance as possible to it, to the intruder.

The storm had waned, but wind still whispered against her window. It did not ease her mind or quicken her sleep.

She slipped to the edge of sleeping for awhile, somewhere between dreaming. A younger woman stood out on the very limits of her dreams, and Astrid couldn't remember all of her features. But she was there, in a soft green dress the color of fresh spring grass with a long mane of golden hair that matched her own. Nearby, the sturdy figure of a man floated with a heavy battle axe gripped tight in his hand. Their silhouettes were fuzzy and frazzled, like the ends of a fur pelt before it had been properly sewn off. They rippled in an inhuman way, like they were reflections on water, almost as if they were getting closer, but she knew they were never would. They never did in these visions. This was how she always remembered them: far away and not quite complete. She should've been surprised she remembered them at all.

Did the boy have people like this? Did he have anyone searching for him? He was grossly filthy and unkempt, and Astrid could imagine no mother that would allow their child to look such a way, especially from the village. Perhaps he was alone. However the waves had washed him up to their shore, it was just as well. They were both alone, she and Valka. And they had managed so far. Another lost one would fit in nicely with them, she supposed.

## 2. Chapter 2

Waking tamped down on her temples with heavy weight. She groaned, disoriented and sat up. The window above the foot of her bed, squared into the slanted ceiling, was shining with dingy new shafts of sunlight. She had not slept soundly, always just on the skirts of deep sleep, and that was the worst.

She could smell fresh cakes downstairs and the scent cleared her brain a bit. She stood and dressed in her usual gear and knotted her free hair into a braid. She wondered if the boy was awake now, but when she opened her door and looked downward upon the tiny house, she saw a steaming basket of tea cakes upon the breakfast table, but an empty kitchen.

The boy was still curled in the alcove beneath the stairs; she could see his long-fingered hands peeking from beneath the blankets.

What young boy in his right mind would sleep through Valka's aromatic cooking of tea cakes? She fisted one, taking a huge bite.

She surveyed the boy's sleeping form, knees curled up under his chin. He couldn't be much older than her, she thought. She stepped closer.

He'd moved during the night, and looked immensely more comfortable and much less like a dead creature just laying there with his head lolling at its own will. She wondered if he'd woken from unconsciousness yet, just sleeping now.

At the thought, as if he'd sensed it, the boy moved.

She stepped back.

With resilience not of a waking Viking, he tossed his furs aside and sat up. His movements were slow and confused in this unfamiliar place and position. His eyes were still closed, and she could see his nose quirking and wrinkling at the new smells around him. Finally, when he did open his eyes, Astrid couldn't hide her gasp.

They were beautiful. The wildest, most intense shade of green she'd never seen. She did not get much time to think on which season of grass they took the shade ofâ€”spring or summerâ€”when he locked his gaze to hers.

His lips curled and his teeth parted into a low snarl that made her spine run with pin-pricks.

Her cake tumbled from her hand, bouncing along the floor leaving a trail of crumbs.

She edged away, reaching behind her to find the end of the breakfast table and scooting around it. She wouldn't let herself be cornered. Hands first, he slipped from his cot to the floor, slithering like a reptile, towards her.

"Stop it," she warned, reaching along the surface for a knife. She found no such protection.

He was too close now, sliding up before her on his knuckles and knees. She winced, and slammed her own knee to his face, hard, once she could get a good angle.

He mewed and caught the splurt of blood with his hands when it burst from his nose.

"Get away from me or you'll get worse," she threatened, glaring down at the unsound creature.

Before she could make her next move, he countered her attack and reached up with gnarled fingernails to swipe at the exposed skin on her forearm. She hissed, mirroring his defensive sound this time, and backing up. Her hand clamped over the wound, feeling the expected sticky wetness stain her fingers.

He lunged and she twisted, dodging him. He tried to coral her to the corner. Confused and bewildered by his movements that were so strangely unhuman, she could not easily predict the next step. She could spring for the axe that hung by the door, and leave her back unprotected in the process. He was too quick and too unpredictable to be allowed the chance.

She moved for the doorway anyways, a better outlet for their shouts and screams if it came to that. But while she retreated, her hand still wrapped over her skin where he'd cut her, his eyes fell to the liquid oozing between her digits.

She watched the rim of his irises grow thinner, and her instincts twitched.

He looked up at her face, making an unsettling cooing noise in his throat that confused her all the more. His scowl had relaxed to something near a grin, or more like wonder. The noise changed again, and she could almost liken it to the purr of a cat.

"What are you..?" she said.

He flattened his palms to her, showing the streaks of red that had settled into the creases of his hands. A gruesome mask of his blood covered his chin. She tried to twist her gaze away from him.

He shuffled, inching himself closer. He understood that she did not want him near. His hands reached for her arm. She'd moved her hand, and the bloodied gashes were exposed now, burning under the rush of fresh air. They weren't too deep, but angry red all the same. He brushed his fingers just under the scratches, and she flinched away, but when she looked back to him he still looked stunned.

His mouth was open slightly, and she could see the row of flat teeth that lined his mouth. At least that part of him was human. He didn't

have rows of razor teeth, though he made the strangest of sounds, like an animal, and she doubted he spoke at all.

"Do you speak?" she asked, staring down at his still filthy face. "Do you understand what you've done?" She pointed with her free hand at her arm, and he seemed to become excited, thinking she was catching on to why he was so intent on staring at the three slashes. He shuffled again and cooed brightly. He showed his palms to her again.

Now she understood. He was trying to tell her. They were the same. She was the first creature that looked like him that he'd met. Now his intrigue made sense.

The door creaked open and Valka's heavy boots and heavy gait thudded against the floorboards. "Oh, he's awake. Oh! What've you done now?" she exclaimed, circling them, hands on her hips.

The boy crouched away, cowering. He didn't seem to be threatened by this woman, like he had been by Astrid. But rather feared her. She didn't seem to be deterred and bent down to grip his chin. The boy mewed helplessly but didn't twist away. "You've hit him, did you?" She clucked her tongue in Astrid's direction, looking over the boy's face. "Well, its not broken. You're just fine."

"He doesn't speak," Astrid said, unmoving.

"I feared that," the woman responded, as if she'd been predicting it.

She released him and he stumbled back on his heels, teetering for the corner. Astrid watched as he lifted a palm to his mouth and drew his tongue across it, licking himself clean.

"He's disgusting," she spat, glaring down upon him.

"He isn't one of our kind," Valka answered, neither refuting nor approving her observation.

He drug a ruddy hand through his hair, and Astrid cringed. Valka was already at the water pump, filing the great washtub they used to bathe. At the noise of rushing water, the boy perked up, but only long enough to monitor that neither of them were paying any attention to him and going back to his licking.

A large square of their goat's milk soap was plopped into the water, fizzing slightly, the surface of the water growing whiteish with thin bubbles. Without pretense, Valka marched over to grab his arm, hauling him upwards. He didn't have time to process the quick motion for several seconds, and then began howling in protest.

"Up with you, and into the tub, you messy pup." She was already stripping him of his ratty tunic. Beneath the bunched fabric, he screeched as if he were being burned. Astrid busied herself with finally having her breakfast peacefully, munching her cake without a plate, and snatching a plump apple from their fruit basket. She heard the definite plop that indicated he'd been thrust into the water. The boy's screams were garbled now with the sounds of drowning. She heard water splashing and Valka's soft reprimands. No longer able to take the noise, she ventured out.

The sheep were at her feet instantly, bleating and baaing as they nipped the toes of her boots. She bent down to pat them.

"Good morning, you fat pigs. Which one of you shall we eat tonight?" It was menacing but teasing, and she couldn't help but laugh to herself about it, streaking her fingers through the thick rows of curls on Louie's head. Valka insisted on naming all their livestock; Astrid thought it ridiculous, but appeased her. The old sheep bellowed up to her, as if volunteering itself and Astrid laughed again.

"Outside of the pen, no telling what you'll dig up. We've just planted the field, and I won't have you destroying it. Get back inside." She kicked, stirring up puffs of dirt and rock, frightening the flock towards the gate of their wide pen. It was built on a shallow hill with plenty of room for them to roam and plenty of grass.

Even outside, she could still hear the screeches inside the house. She sank her teeth into her apple with purpose.

She hated him. He was disgusting and strange and a complete intrusion. It was not that she did not appreciate other children being brought into Valka's home. She had been four when the twins arrived, and grown up with them. Other children had been brought in here and there, always leaving. But he was different. He did not belong. He was so strange, and so unhuman. Like—like a dragon. Her stomach churned and burned at the thought.

That was it. The realization hit her like it must've hit him earlier that they were similar beings.

He was a dragon. Or rather, thought he was. Had he grown up with them? Did he live with the beasts?

Astrid disliked the beasts to the core. Anger and violence bred fear, and she wouldn't deny the thought that she was at least a bit apprehensive. It all had to do with her parents' murder. And what she'd seen. Valka's views were milder than hers, and the subject was sensitive whenever they tried to discuss it. But Astrid knew them to be mean, vicious creatures, and if this boy knew them, he could be no exception. By the way he'd sprung on her from the start, she knew.

There was no room for him here, not uncivilized as he was. They were better off to set him off on a raft back out into the ocean he'd washed in on.

The noise in the house had quieted after a few more minutes. She had forgotten her axe in her hurry to leave, and when she went back inside to fetch it for her morning work out, Valka was drying her hands on a cloth, and the boy was wrapped in a thick fur, sitting by the fire pit. His hair was slick and darker auburn, almost crimson. His skin was clean, his bright eye shining under the firelight as he watched the flames.

He looked dazed and shell-shocked, his mouth agape. A high-pitched hiccup bubbled from his lungs and his shoulders hitched.



Valka glanced over her shoulder at the girl, tossing down her towel. "Swallowed more of the water than he bathed in, he did." A grin tweaked her lips and made Astrid's own lips curl downward. "Though, it's just as well. He's all clean now." She patted the boy's head as she passed. His shoulders trembled again with a new bout of bubbly breaths.

"Maybe we should call him Hiccup, then," she said offhandedly, apathetically, unhooking her axe from its spot on the wall.

"Wonderful idea, dear!" Valka said brightly, and Astrid turned with eyebrows raised.

"I was kidding. We're not going to \_name \_him, are we?"

"Why not? We don't know his name, and we haven't any way of figuring it out if he won't or doesn't speak. And if he's going to stay, we'll want to have something to know him by. After all, everybody has a name, don't they?" She drew a carved comb through his hair, and the boy didn't protest anymore.

Had she actually tamed him enough to make him comfortable enough to be touched?

She wanted to shout and protest and tell Valka just how absolutely outrageous this was. More harebrained than any of her other schemes she'd been a part of and been tolerant of all these years.

"I'm going out," she declared, thumping her axe once in finality against the floor before lifting it again and marching outside.

End  
file.